

BRONX FOCUS

PAINTINGS BY VALERI LARKO





Garages, Timpson Place, Bronx, 2011, oil on linen, 24" x 68"

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April 6th through June 26th, 2016

BRONX MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION

The current exhibition *Bronx Focus: Paintings by Valeri Larko* at The Bronx Museum of the Arts is the artist's first solo museum exhibition in New York City. Having followed her work for several years, I am delighted that our local community and general audiences will have the opportunity to explore the complex history and beauty of our borough's urban landscape and natural reserves through Larko's exquisite paintings. Larko's work is not only a celebration of the ingenuity and grit of the Bronx's various industries, but also a tribute to the many ordinary men and women who continue to shape and preserve the community in the present.

Bronx Focus: Paintings by Valeri Larko follows on an established line of curatorial research

pioneered by the Bronx Museum since its foundation in 1973, and that endeavors to look at the ongoing transformations going on in the borough through the lens of art. Exhibitions such as *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx* (1979), *Building a New Borough: Architecture and Planning in the Bronx, 1890-1940* (1986), and *Urban Mythologies: The Bronx* (1999), to name a few, represent the line of continuity that Larko's paintings are now offering, as the shifting image of the Bronx moves from one of urban decay to renewal.

Special thanks goes to Heather Reyes for organizing this exhibition and for her contribution to the catalog, and to Antonio Sergio Bessa, Director of Curatorial and Education Programs, for bringing Valeri's work to the

museum's attention. I also thank printer Prestige Color and Anne Finkelstein for her wonderful catalog design. I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to the generous supporters who made *Bronx Focus: Paintings by Valeri Larko* possible: AAL Construction Services, Jane M. Byrne, Oak Point Property, Juhi Saigal-Shah and Neil H. Shah, Emily and Gavin Stark, Navah and Robert Frost, Maureen and Anthony Monaco, Peter Riccio, Maudie Shanley, and Dr. and Mrs. Martin Reichel.

—Holly Block
Executive Director



BRONX FOCUS: Paintings by Valeri Larko

Over the span of three decades, Valeri Larko has established a practice deliberate in its methods and rich in complexity. From her earliest paintings, which she completed in Jersey City in the late 1980s, to her foray into urban landscapes in the Bronx initiated in 2005, Larko has been persistent in her intent to expose the clash between the industrial world and nature. In her practice, Larko works primarily from life and relies on sketches made over the course of several visits. This careful search for an ideal subject ultimately leads her to work for months or years en plein air at her chosen location. Although Larko follows in the centuries-old tradition of figurative painting, which includes the French Impressionists and the Hudson River School, the focus of her Bronx paintings in particular speak to larger concerns beyond the simple documentation of her local environment. It is this key trait that also distinguishes Larko from Photorealists such as Richard Estes, as curator Mary Birmingham keenly notes, “(the artist) does not aim to replicate the look of a photograph, as evidenced by her brushwork...a closer look reveals a painterly approach on her part.” With their distinct backstories and wide-ranging palette, the forty works in *Bronx Focus* highlight the vibrancy

and dynamism that exists at the fringes of New York City’s northernmost borough.

Larko’s journey to the Bronx began in 2004, when she moved from her native New Jersey to southern New Rochelle, New York. The artist considers herself an urban explorer, and after exhausting all her options in her new neighborhood, she turned her sights to areas along the Hutchinson River that eventually led her to Eastchester and the Bronx. Larko’s discovery of the Eastchester Barge Canal and the Bronx River served as inspirations for an early focus on river views in Hunt’s Point, as seen in *Sal’s Bronx* (2005), *Westchester Creek, Bronx*, NY (2007), and *Pier, Bronx* (2007). The former paintings establish an almost serene coexistence between the city’s waterways, lush greenery, and buildings and apartments that dot the landscape, while *Pier*, with its crumbled wooden pillars standing sentinel in the cool grey water, alludes to the abandoned industrial edges of a once thriving maritime waterfront. Other early paintings situated near the waterfront also touch on the collision of decaying infrastructure and nature, including *Edgewater Road, Bronx* (2006), where the concrete and bright metallic structures of a cement factory stands in sharp relief against the small field of grass,

weeds, and trees that have stubbornly risen around it. The endearing *Houseboats, Bronx* (2007), in turn, features a tidy row of boats that line a small marina along Westchester Creek, providing a snapshot of an unlikely community stubbornly finding respite even amongst the crowded highways and billboards of the city only a few feet away. The history of the Bronx River and its many canals as conduits of business and a natural resource has eroded in the past century, and Larko astutely captures that paradox of water “that is at once a preserve and a place for waste, simultaneously majestic and degraded, peaceful and distressed.”

Encouraged by her work on these initial landscapes, Larko moved further into the borough where she encountered isolated spaces permeated by graffiti-filled buildings. The earliest of these, *Graffiti, Zerega Ave, Bronx* (2008), focuses on an area behind a building that was formerly used as an oil terminal for the barges that once traveled along the Westchester Creek and that is now crowded with automobile repair shops. In addition to the isolation and peacefulness of the space, Larko was particularly drawn to the elaborate graffiti that covered the walls and the billboard above. The resulting painting is painstaking



Photo Credit: John Wyatt

in its attention to each swooping line and colorful shade of the tags on the wall, as well as the shoots of green grass that break through the concrete sidewalk and the random metallic chair on the left. As with many of Larko’s paintings, however, the site itself did not remain; after completing about 80 percent of the work, the artist returned to her spot to find a “Graffiti Free NYC” truck stationed in the parking lot, indicating that the owner of the building had plans to paint over all of the graffiti. Larko subsequently finished the work by using photographs that she has taken earlier

in her scouting process, and what was once an interesting, peripheral location suddenly became, through the act of painting, an unintended mini-eulogy for the street artists who spent their time working and practicing their craft on the building. These realities of movement and time, usually not considered when observing figurative landscape painting, all find a prominent role in Larko’s work, especially as the Bronx continues to expand culturally, as well as economically. In capturing the fleeting presence of varying sites in their original state (such as *Graffiti, Zerega Ave*), the artist’s seem-

ingly static views transform into landscapes of change, a visual imprint that records a sort of social history of the site as it evolves in time.

These forces of construction and destruction, for example, of a landscape that breathes and changes, continue to appear throughout many of Larko’s Bronx paintings. She often stumbles on new subjects while working on other paintings, and it was during her time spent at the site of Bronx Drawbridge (2010) that she noticed the unmistakable pink hue of the Ferris Stahl-Meyer packing plant formerly located on Boone Avenue. Completed over a two-and-a-half-year period, her series of paintings *Ferris Stahl Meyer Diptych* (2012), *Meat Packing Plant, Bronx* (2012), and *Ferris Stahl Meyer Shipping* (2013), offer a touching portrait of an edifice that served as both a symbol of industry and a fertile canvas for local graffiti artists. As with many of the sites Larko paints, the background of her subjects are revealed voluntarily by the people around her: the president and CEO of Ferris Stahl-Meyer, Guillermo Gonzalez, informed the artist that he personally encouraged street artists such as Cope2 and Royal Kingbee to cover the building’s exterior walls with graffiti. Larko’s paintings of the packing plant, twenty-one in



Pier, Bronx, 2007, oil on linen, 20" x 62"

total, capture the resulting artwork from various angles, her attention to detail focused on rendering the various tags as faithfully as possible. As a de-facto cultural landmark, the Ferris Stahl-Meyer packing plant was seen as the Bronx's version of the Five Points building in Queens, with the graffiti-packed walls used as a backdrop for fashion shoots, rap videos, and even the occasional wedding. Demolished in 2014 to make way for real estate, the social and community impact of the Ferris Stahl-Meyer building lives on in the brushstrokes of Larko's diptych and accompanying paintings, a sad emblem of the forces of gentrification, but also a memorial that captures the past better

than any photograph.

Recent works completed within the past two years showcase a synthesis of what brought Larko to the Bronx in the first place, as she jumps back and forth easily between transcendent water views and architectural sites that have been revamped into repositories for graffiti. *Oak Point Docks, Bronx* (2014) focuses on the wood and stone remnants of a once functioning dock situated near a freight railway yard, while *Salt Marsh, Bronx* (2014) features a once eroded water source that is currently being reseeded and once again attracting wildlife—both paintings capture the importance of these waterways in the

borough's past and present. In contrast, *Bronx Scrap Yard* (2015) documents the various economic trends currently shifting spaces that exist at the fringes of the city. What appears at once to be a standard scrap yard is in fact an underground mecca for graffiti artists. The abandoned trucks and cars stationed at the bottom of an overpass were used as canvases for artists working as far away as Massachusetts, before it was paved over recently for redevelopment. The painting once again acts as a record of the site, but there is verbal history to go with it: the graffiti artist who spotted Larko on the overpass in the painting and rushed over to tell her about the importance

of the yard, as well as the random tenant living in the camper on the far left who had a perfectly good home out west to live in, but chose to live alone among the scraps.

What are viewers to make of these locations that have been forcibly removed, eroded in time, or perhaps are once again returning to the living, rendered in colorful detail and delicacy? As the borough undergoes widespread shifts in various industries and real estate, Larko's paintings take on new dimensions: of artworks as receptacles for memory and

preservation in the face of change, and of the appreciation of a neighborhood's architecture and history, rundown or forgotten as it may be. More importantly, despite the lack of people in these urban landscapes, Larko's paintings are ultimately a record of the Bronx community: of the steelworkers, automobile repairmen, street artists, and resilient denizens whose handprints are all over the buildings and waterways that have built and shaped the borough.

—Heather Reyes

- 1 Valeri Larko: *Urban Edges* (Clinton, NJ: Hunterdon Art Museum, 2009), 6.
- 2 Rocio Aranda-Alvarado, Valeri Larko: *Two Decades* (Morristown, NJ: Morris Museum, 2010), 5.



Houseboats, Bronx, 2007, oil on linen, 22" x 52"



Sal's Bronx, 2005, oil on linen, 12" x 36"



Edgewater Road, Bronx, 2006, oil on linen, 26" x 56"



Tremont Avenue Subway, Bronx, 2006, oil on linen, 12" x 40"



Graffiti, Zerega Ave, Bronx, 2008, oil on linen, 42" x 35"



Gaseria, Bronx, 2009, oil on linen, 28" x 56"



Concrete Park, Bronx, 2009, oil on linen, 12" x 24"



Left: *Bronx Drawbridge*, 2010, oil on linen, 40" x 52"

Right: *Billboard*, 144th Street, Bronx, 2011, oil on linen, 42" x 30"





Horse Rides, Bronx, 2012, oil on linen, 32" x 54"



Meat Packing Plant, Bronx, 2012, oil on linen 20" x 66"



Ferris Stahl Meyer Diptych, 2012, oil on linen, 32" x 116"



Flamingo Lounge, Bronx, 2012, gouache & watercolor, 7" x 10"



Bronx Overpasses, 2013, oil on linen, 24" x 56"



Bronx Golf Center, 2013, oil on linen, 12" x 24"



Corner of Boone Ave & 173rd Street, 2014, oil on linen, 30" x 52"



Oak Point Docks, Bronx, 2014, oil on linen, 27" x 60"



Salt Marsh, Castle Hill Road, Bronx, 2014, oil on linen, 22" x 72"



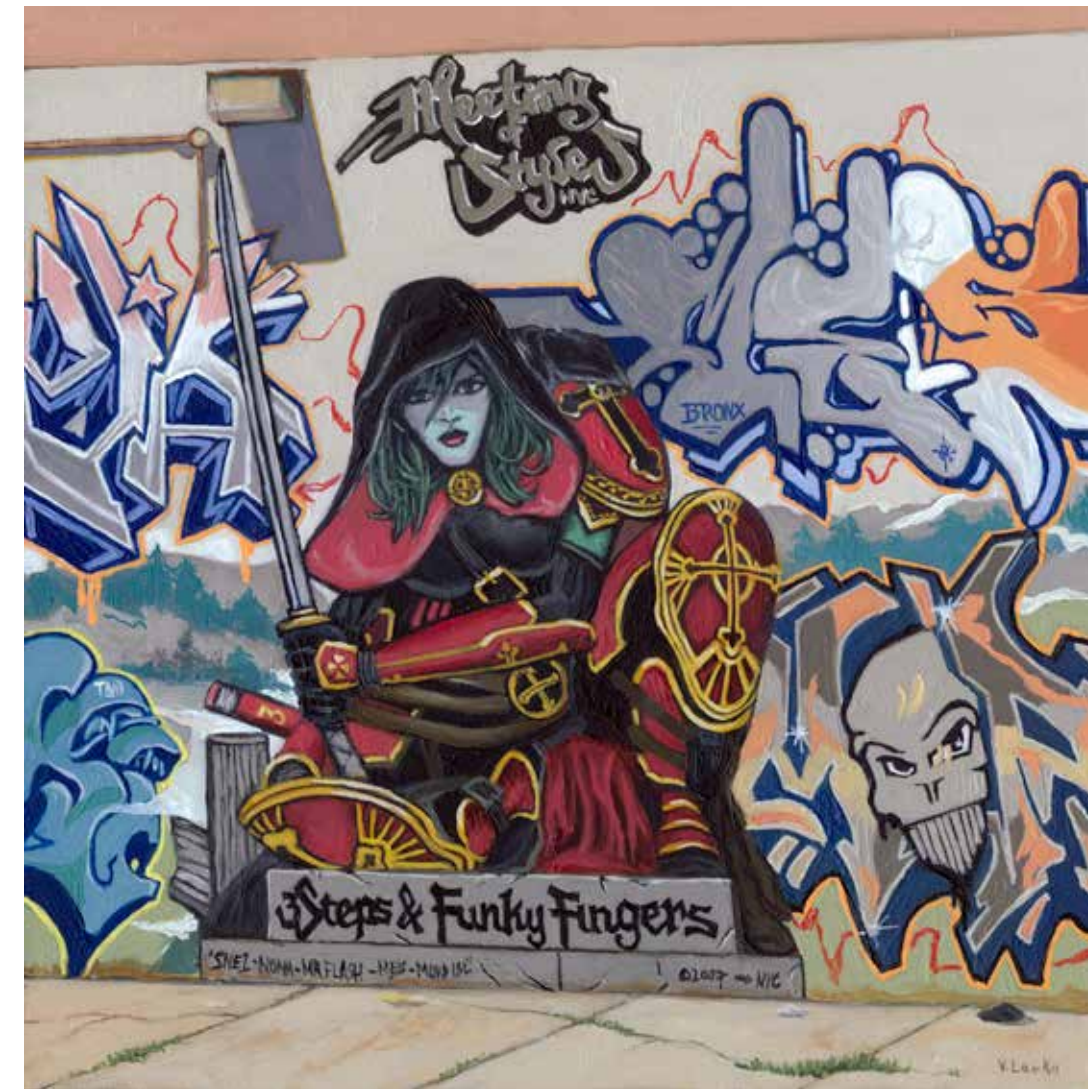
Acer Warehouse, Bronx, 2014, oil on linen, 20" x 64"



Bronx Scrap Yard, 2015, oil on linen, 25" x 72"



Ferris Stahl Meyer Shipping, 2013, oil on linen, 32" x 58"



Meeting of Styles NYC, 2013, oil on panel, 12" x 12"



Power Ball, 2015, oil on panel, 18" x 24"



Top Dollar (study), 2015, oil on gessoed watercolor paper, 12.5" x 30"

CHECK LIST

1. *Sal's Bronx*, 2005, oil on linen, 12" x 36", Collection of Thea Eichler
2. *Edgewater Road, Bronx*, 2006, oil on linen, 26" x 56"
3. *Edgewater Road, Bronx* (study), 2006, oil on canvas, 10" x 20"
4. *Tremont Avenue Subway, Bronx*, 2006, oil on linen, 12" x 40"
Collection of Col. Eugene R. Ross
5. *Westchester Creek, Bronx*, 2007, oil on linen, 20" x 74"
6. *Westchester Creek, Bronx*, 2007, oil on prepared paper, 8.5" x 29.5"
7. *Pier, Bronx*, 2007, oil on linen, 20" x 62",
Collection of Amy Hsu and Nathan Fong
8. *Houseboats, Bronx*, 2007, oil on linen, 22" x 52",
Collection of Kara & Mark Glasgold
9. *Graffiti, Zerega Ave, Bronx*, 2008, oil on linen, 42" x 35"
10. *Rusting Gantries*, 2008, oil on linen, 30" x 50",
Collection of Maudie & Kevin Shanley.
11. *Rusting Gantries* (study), 2008, oil on gessoed watercolor paper,
15" x 22.5", Collection of Janis and Michael Hubschman
12. *Concrete Park, Bronx*, 2009, oil on linen, 12" x 24"
13. *Gaseteria, Bronx*, 2009, oil on linen, 28" x 56",
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Martin Reichel.
14. *Bronx Drawbridge*, 2010, oil on linen, 40" x 52"
15. *Garages, Timpson Place, Bronx*, 2011, oil on linen, 24" x 68"
16. *Billboard, 144th Street, Bronx*, 2011, oil on linen, 42" x 30"
17. *Billboard Bronx* (study), 2011, oil on board, 10" x 8",
Collection of Iris and Bob Bernstein
18. *Power Plant, Bronx*, 2011, gouache & watercolor, 7" x 5"
19. *Bronx Cyclone*, 2011, gouache & watercolor, 10" x 7"
20. *Horse Rides, Bronx*, 2012, oil on linen, 32" x 54"
21. *Ferris Stahl Meyer Diptych*, 2012, oil on linen, 32" x 116"
22. *Meat Packing Plant, Bronx*, 2012, oil on linen, 20" x 66"
23. *Flamingo Lounge, Bronx*, 2012, gouache & watercolor, 7" x 10"
24. *Bronx Golf Center*, 2013, oil on linen, 12" x 24"
25. *Bronx Overpasses*, 2013, oil on linen, 24" x 56"
26. *Bronx Overpasses* (study), 2013, oil on gessoed watercolor paper,
12.5" x 31.5", Collection of Phil Petruzzelli
27. *Ferris Stahl Meyer Shipping*, 2013, oil on linen, 32" x 58"
28. *Ferris Stahl Meyer Shipping* (study), 2013, oil on gessoed watercolor paper,
9.5" x 14.5", Collection of Maureen and Anthony Monaco
29. *Meeting of Styles NYC*, 2013, oil on panel, 12" x 12",
Collection of Jolene Tritt and Paul Herzog
30. *Corner of Boone Ave & 173rd St*, 2014, oil on linen, 30" x 52"
31. *Oak Point Docks, Bronx*, 2014, oil on linen, 27" x 60"
32. *Salt Marsh, Castle Hill Road, Bronx*, 2014, oil on linen, 22" x 72"
33. *Acer Warehouse, Bronx*, 2014, oil on linen, 20" x 64"
34. *Bronx Scrap Yard*, 2015, oil on linen, 25" x 72"
35. *Bronx Scrap Yard* (study), 2015, oil on linen, 12.5" x 27.5"
36. *Power Ball*, 2015, oil on panel, 18" x 24"
37. *END, E 132nd St, Bronx*, 2015, oil on linen, 32" x 60"
38. *Top Dollar* (study), 2015, oil on gessoed watercolor paper, 12.5" x 30"
39. *Boston Road, Bronx*, 2015, gouache & watercolor, 7" x 10"
40. *Bernarda's Beauty Shop, Bronx*, 2015, gouache & watercolor, 7" x 10"

Unless otherwise noted, all works courtesy of the artist and Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, NY.



Boston Road, Bronx, 2015, gouache & watercolor, 7" x 10"

VALERI LARKO

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 Bronx Museum, Bronx, NY (catalogue, essay)
Hampden Gallery, University of MA, Amherst
WallWorks NY, Bronx, NY

2015 Lyons Wier Gallery, New York City, "Location, Location, Location"
Carol Schlosberg Gallery, Montserrat College of Art, & Design Beverly.
MA "A Bronx Block"

2013 Adoni Group Showroom in collaboration with J. Cacciola Gallery,
New York City

2012 Majestic Theatre Lobby, Jersey City, NJ, Tanks, Trash and Graffiti
curated by Brendan Carroll

2010 Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ, Valeri Larko: Two Decades
(catalogue, essay)

2009 Hunterdon Art Museum, Clinton, NJ, Urban Edges, (catalogue, essay)
Bronx Borough President's Art Gallery, Bronx, NY

2008 College of New Rochelle, NY

2007 Domo Gallery, Summit, NJ
Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, NJ

2006 Safe-T-Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
Bronx River Art Center, Bronx, NY

2005 The Art Guild of Rahway, Rahway, NJ, Consumed, (catalogue, essay)

2003 Secaucus Transfer Station, NJ, Permanent Installation of
NJ Transit Murals

1999 Kent Place Gallery, Summit, NJ

1998 Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, NJ, Works on Paper

1997 Johnson & Johnson Gallery, Corporate Headquarters,
New Brunswick, NJ

1996 New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ, (catalogue, essay)

1994 Union County College, Tomasulo Gallery, Cranford, NJ

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS SINCE 1998

2016 Lehman College Art Gallery, The City University of New York, Bronx,
Architectural Intersections

Visual Arts Center of NJ, Summit: Guide Ropes & Live Wires:
Works by the Art Center Faculty

2015 The Center for Contemporary Art, Bedminster, NJ "+1:
Painters look at Painters"

2014 Art Southampton exhibiting with J. Cacciola Gallery

2013 Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, Burlington, "High Trash"
J. Cacciola Gallery, New York City, "Exit the Freeway",
Two Person exhibition
Art Miami exhibiting with J. Cacciola Gallery
Art Southampton exhibiting with J. Cacciola Gallery

2012 Bronx Museum, NY, "Bronx Lab: Style Wars" through June 2, 2013
Stockton College Art Gallery, Galloway, "NJ Learning from New Jersey:
Paintings By Tim Daly & Valeri Larko"
J. Cacciola Gallery, New York City, Recent Paintings,
Two Person exhibition
Context Art Fair, Miami, exhibiting with J. Cacciola Gallery
Barbara Frigerio Gallery, Milan, Italy, Group summer show
Bulter Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, "Contemporary
American Realism"

2011 Knickerbocker Loft, New Rochelle, NY, Knickerbocker 2011
curated by John Reverol

2010 Studio21South, North Adams, MA, " Re/Imaging New York"

2009 ACA Galleries, "New York: Then and Now", New York City
Mikhail Zakin Gallery, Old Church Cultural Center, Demarest, NJ,
"Our Present Planet"

2008 St Joseph College, Brooklyn, NY, "Two Artists, Two Realities",
Two person Exhibition
Jersey City Museum, NJ, "Sprawl" (catalogue)
Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ, "New Jersey, Then and Now"
Krasdale Galleries, Krasdale Foods Corporate Headquarters,
White Plains, NY, Travels to Bronx, NY

2007 Art Now Miami, FL, Art Fair showing with Safe T Gallery
Metaphor Contemporary Art, Brooklyn, New York "Green"

Aferro Gallery, Newark, New Jersey, "Our Man in Havana,
The Vacuum Cleaner in Art"

2006 Atlantic Gallery, New York City, "Trash, what we value and
what we throw away"
Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, "Palpable Painting"

2005 Jersey City Museum, NJ, "Jersey City Interprets" (works from the
Permanent Collection)
Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY, "Artistic Fragments"
curated by Benny Andrews
Victory Hall, Jersey City, NJ, "SKYway" curated by Rocío
Aranda-Alvarado, Jersey City Museum

2004 Newark Arts Council, Newark, NJ, "Mix in the Bricks"
curated by Chakaia Booker
Art in Embassies Program, Minsk, Belarus 2004-2007

2003 NJ State Council on the Arts, Trenton, NJ "Selections from the State
Museum's Permanent Collection"
Metaphor Contemporary Art, Brooklyn, New York, "Paper 2003"
Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ, "NJ Fine Arts Annual," (catalogue)

2002 Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, NJ, "Preview: NJ Transit
Murals," Two Person Exhibit
NJ State Museum, Trenton, NJ, "Women's Works: Fine Art from the
Museum's Collection"
Bruton Street Gallery, London, England, "Gallery Artists," (catalogue)

2001 Bruton Street Gallery, London, England, "New Year, New Talent,"
catalogue)
Rutgers University, Newark, NJ, "15E: Contemporary Art and the
NJ Turnpike," (catalogue)

2000 Pierogi, Brooklyn, New York, Flat Files
Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, NJ, "From the Slide Registry"
Three Person Exhibition

1999 New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ, "New Jersey Arts Annual,"
(catalogue)
Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, "Uncommon Landscape"

1998 MB Modern Gallery, New York City, "New York Perspectives"
National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, Art in the Academy,

Two Person Exhibit
Saint Anselm College, Manchester, New Hampshire,
"The Art of Representation"
William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ, Ben Shahn Galleries," Biennial,"
(catalogue)

AWARDS

2009 Joyce Dutka Art Foundation Award for painting

2006 George Sugarman Foundation Grant for painting
Strategic Opportunity Grant, NY State Council on the Arts and NY
Foundation for the Arts

2002 Artist in Residence Fellowship, Newark Museum

1998 Residency Fellowship, Vermont Studio Center

1992 Painting Fellowship, New Jersey State Council on the Arts
167rd Annual Julius Hallgarten Prize, National Academy of Design,
New York City (catalogue)

1988 163rd Annual Julius Hallgarten Prize, National Academy of Design,
New York City (catalogue)

PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND LECTURES

2015 Hudson County Community College: Facing the Dilemmas of the
World, panel discussion with artists from the HCCC
Permanent Collection.
BX200 Virtual Artist Studios in conjunction with No Longer Empty's
exhibition "When You Cut Into the Present, the Future Leaks Out."
Presentation of the Ferris Stahl Meyers paintings.

2014 Artist Talk: Montserrat College of Art

2010 Valeri Larko: Two Decades, Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ

2009 Industrial Postmortem: Panel discussion at Jersey City Museum, NJ

2008 Two Artists, Two Realities, Artist talk, St Joseph's college, Brooklyn, NY

2007 Artists Using Discards: Media and Message, Chakaia Booker, Jenny
Krasner, Valeri Larko, Panel Discussion & Exhibit, Federation of NY solid
waste and recycling convention, Sagamore, Lake George, NY

2002 Artist in Residence Lecture and Exhibition: Newark Museum, NJ



END, E 132nd St, Bronx, 2015, oil on linen, 32" x 60"

COLOPHON

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Cover Image: *Oak Point Docks, Bronx, 2014, oil on linen, 27" x 60" (detail)*

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April 6–June 26, 2016

Organized by Heather Reyes

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